

(Washington, DC)— Congresswoman Gwen Moore unveiled legislation today that would increase funding for school breakfast programs in schools across the nation. The Student Breakfast and Education Improvement Act of 2007 would provide grants – awarded on a competitive basis – to schools with at least 65 percent of students eligible for free and reduced price lunch. Senators Kohl and Feingold unveiled the Senate’s version of the bill in early October.

“We need to give kids the chance to focus on learning instead of food. I know firsthand what it’s like to go hungry to school, and let me tell you, it’s nearly impossible to focus in class when all you can think about is food,” Congresswoman Gwen Moore said. “Rather than trying to learn on an empty stomach, this legislation will allow our children to start the school day off with a nutritious breakfast.”

Currently, Wisconsin ranks last in both school participation and low-income student participation in the school breakfast program. Just 62% of Milwaukee County Schools participated in the School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program during the 2004-05 school year, while 79% of schools nationwide participate in both programs.

The legislation encourages creative breakfast programming to allow schools to tailor the benefits of providing breakfast to their own students and curriculums. This would include serving breakfast during the school day, incorporating local foods into breakfasts, and providing nutritional education. Eligible schools would apply for grants through their local school districts or states.

The Student Breakfast and Education Improvement Act of 2007 is co-sponsored by Reps. Sheila Jackson-Lee, Ed Towns, Keith Ellison, Danny Davis, Al Wynn, John Lewis, Diane Watson, Barbara Lee, Chris Van Hollen, Ron Kind, Janice Schakowsky and Carol Shea-Porter.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), school breakfast programs can have a tremendous impact on student academic performance and improve the classroom environment by reducing tardiness and improving student attentiveness. Yet, the FNS reveals only 7.5 million students nationally participated in the Free and Reduced Price Breakfast program in 2006 compared with nearly 30 million who participated in the Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program the same year.

Kohl, Feingold and Moore's legislation provides resources for local schools to address this disparity and overcome the specific barriers they face in a way that is flexible yet emphasizes proven methods to increase breakfast participation.

Qualified schools could use the grant money to:

- establish, promote, or expand a school breakfast program, which would include a nutritional education component;
 - increase the quantity of local or fresh food available, and provide agricultural field trips or examples in the classroom;
 - provide school breakfast to students during the school day;
 - increase participation in the school breakfast program, including through a universal free breakfast program;
- compensate for receipts no longer collected from reduced and paid breakfasts when operating a universal free breakfast program.

The Student Breakfast and Education Improvement Act of 2007 is supported by the Hunger Task Force, Community Food Security Coalition, American Association of School Administrators, School Social Work Association of America and Wisconsin School Social Workers Association.

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